

**REMARKS BY REP. LUIS V. GUTIERREZ
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MARCH 2, 2011**

Two weeks ago I spoke about a serious problem in Puerto Rico.

The problem is a systemic effort by the ruling party to deny the right of the people to speak freely, to criticize their government openly, and to make their voices heard.

I talked about student protests that had been met with violent resistance by Puerto Rican police. I talked about closed meetings of the legislature, and about efforts to silence the local Bar Association.

I was not the first to speak about it. And I could have said much more.

The report, "Human Rights Crisis in Puerto Rico: First Amendment Under Siege" is searing.

It details the complaints of students, legislators, the press, and the general public who were beaten and pepper sprayed by police.

Female students who were treated with gross disrespect by the police.

The government's overreaction to demonstrations at the University and at the Capitol over the budget cuts and layoffs...

This is the Capitol building.

This is how the police dealt with protesters.

The images of police tactics and behavior explain why the Department of Justice is investigating the Puerto Rican police for "excessive force" and "unconstitutional searches."

How could you see these images and not speak out?

And I was hardly the first to speak out about these matters and will not be the last...

As a member of Congress, it is more than my right – it is my obligation – to speak out when fundamental freedoms are attacked.

And what was the response to my speech defending the right of the Puerto Rican people to be heard?

It was to challenge my right to be heard.

The resident commissioner of Puerto Rico said that only he is authorized to speak about Puerto Rico in this body.

This week the Puerto Rico legislature debated a resolution of censure – yes, censure -- condemning me for speaking out against these abuses.

A leading member of the ruling party even said, 'Gutierrez was not born in Puerto Rico. His kids weren't born in Puerto Rico. Gutierrez doesn't plan on being buried in Puerto Rico...So Gutierrez doesn't have the right to speak about Puerto Rico...'

Let me tell you something...

If you see injustice anywhere, it is not only your right but your duty to speak out about it.

We don't speak out against injustice, or Apartheid, or human rights abuses, or the denial of rights to women in places around the world because we ourselves were born there.

That's silly.

Where we see injustice we speak out because it is the right thing to do.

Ironically, by questioning my right to speak out on behalf of free speech, they have made my point crystal clear. By challenging my free speech, they have amplified the words of my five minute speech more than if I had spoken for five hours.

And it is their right. My critics have the right of free-speech even as they deny that same right to others.

And I want them to understand this:

Your efforts to silence me – just like your efforts to silence so many people in Puerto Rico who disagree with you -- will fail, just as every effort to blockade progress only makes the march toward justice more powerful and swift.

I may not be Puerto Rican enough for some people, but I know this: nowhere on earth will you find a people harder to silence than Puerto Ricans.

You won't locate my love for Puerto Rico on my birth certificate or a driver's license, my children's birth certificate or any other piece of paper.

My love for Puerto Rico is right here – in my heart -- a heart that beats with our history and our language and our heroes.

A place where -- when I moved there as a teenager -- people talked and argued and debated because we care deeply about our island and our future.

That's still true today – and that freedom is still beating in the hearts of university students, working men and women, labor leaders, lawyers, and environmentalists and every person who believes in free speech.

You will not silence them, and you will not silence me.

Abraham Lincoln, a leader who valued freedom above all else, said:

“Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves.”

It's good advice, and I hope Puerto Rican leaders take it.

I request unanimous consent that the ACLU of Puerto Rico report, "Human Rights Crisis in Puerto Rico: First Amendment Under Siege" be entered into the record.

I further request unanimous consent that a statement by the President of the Service Employees International Union be entered into the record and that the essay, "Exposing the Shadows of Civil Rights in Puerto Rico" by the National Puerto Rican Coalition, also be entered into the record.

 [ACLU Report: Human Rights Crisis in Puerto Rico](#)

[Statement](#) by the President of the SEIU

National Puerto Rican Coalition essay, ["Exposing the Shadows of Civil Rights in Puerto Rico"](#)